

CASE Study – A focus group to gather information for training objectives at four ROI Levels / CalSTRS Analyst Training

Introduction to the case study

In 2010 CALSTRS was introducing a new analyst series and as their training partner, we wanted to refine the objectives for this analyst series at multiple levels. In order to do this, we conducted a series of focus groups with analysts (participants in the upcoming training) and supervisors of the analysts. Note: The analyst series was a series of 10 course days over a 2-3 month period. (See page 4 for course titles)

NOTE: In the following pages you see material in black print – you will see the original text from the form and questions used in the focus groups.

NOTE: In the following pages in blue print – you will see supplemental comments that are for the purpose of our case study today. In other words, an examination of the process, some lessons learned, and a few tips or pointers you might choose to use as you develop or refine training objectives for your training programs.

Form for the focus groups – Using Four ROI Levels

Los Rios CCD / Govt Training Academy

Groups: Supervisors of Analysts / Superior Performing Analysts

(Note: this language is specifically for supervisors, and will be slightly modified when presented to analysts)

START: Short introduction to program, focus group process, explain what we will do with information (refine and customize the program for CALSTRS), answer questions from participant, etc.

Overall strategy – Ask questions, record responses, probe for associated issue(s) using a Return on Investment information gathering methodology.

Level 1 – Reaction to Training (reaction, satisfaction, relevance)

- Introductory Question: We are going to kick-off with a real “softball” question... Please think of a training program at CALSTRS that was extremely well received (appreciated, enjoyed, deemed relevant, useful, enjoyable, etc.) Course could have been for your analysts, for you, for others, and if you are new to agency, you can use another agency.

CASE STUDY NOTE: Now we use this information to add to, delete from or modify level one or the reaction assessment. Fairly rare to make any big changes.

Example of a few items noted and used in Reaction or Level One Survey

The focus group yielded the following information: Attendees to this program are likely to find value in a cohort program that spreads learning out over time, with each class building on the foundation of its predecessors. Participants are also likely to find value in obtaining practical, “next-level” tools and skills that they can use right away back on the job, as well as being encouraged to identify ways in which they can do things differently after each class.

Level 2 – Learning

- If this program were entirely successful, what would analysts have learned by the end of the program that they don't know now. (or know well enough...)
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CASE STUDY NOTE: Now we use this information to add to, delete from or modify level two objectives.

Example of a few items noted and used in Learning or Level Two Survey

Note: We already had learning objectives established for this series of courses, so the information gathered in the focus group simply allowed us to focus on areas of learning most important to the analysts and supervisors at CALSTRS. The following is a very abbreviated summary of the findings.

1. Ask Questions

- Think critically
- Ask probing questions

2. Understand the Big Picture

- Understand the roles and responsibilities of an analyst
- Know what “textbook” analyst work looks like

3. Focus-in on issues/problems

- Break problems into smaller components
- Do root cause and risk analysis

4. Be Thorough

- Solve problems more thoroughly
- Complete the Completed Staff Work process without holes

5. Manage Up

- “Manage up”, meaning being prepared when they go to their manager
- Do their homework/research before going to the supervisor

Level 3 - Application of new skills

- Again, if this course series were wildly and absolutely successful, what would analysts be doing better/differently at the conclusion of the program? *Think – what positive things might they be doing MORE of? What negative things might they be doing LESS of?*
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CASE STUDY NOTE: Now we use this information to add to, delete from or modify level three objectives.

Example of a few items noted and used in Application or the Level Three Survey

Note: We already had application objectives established for this series of courses, so the information gathered in the focus group simply allowed us to focus on areas of application most important to the analysts and supervisors at CALSTRS. The following is a very abbreviated summary of the findings. Much of this information is similar to the information for level two (learning) and this is often the case, but asking about application often takes learners in a different direction or higher level. Many times information is uncovered at this level that can then be added to the learning objectives.

1. Ask Questions

- Asking questions, especially the right questions, to get thorough analysis
- Effective research

2. Understand the Big Picture

- Seeing and understanding the big picture while being able to focus in on a problem
- Accountability

3. Focus-in on issues/problems

- Consideration of alternatives when doing analysis and making a recommendation
- Critical thinking

4. Be Thorough

- Fully vetted issue papers that include a supported cost-benefit s analysis and are supported by law
- Effective issue papers, procedures, correspondence

5. Manage Up

- Understanding and meeting deadlines and communicating those with the supervisor consistently
- Communication with the supervisor in general

Barriers and Enablers

- What barriers to the application of these new skills do you see/anticipate?
 - Can you think of any ways that these barriers might be lessened or overcome?
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CASE STUDY NOTE: Asking about barriers and enablers is an important part of the level three process. Since we are asking participants how they would apply skills “back on the job” this is a good time to get an indication of what might get in the way of application and also how these barriers may be overcome or mitigated. (Below are a few examples of barriers and enablers that were identified)

<u>Barriers</u>	<u>Enablers</u>
Analysts' time/opportunities	More time
Quality of supervisor/manager	Managing up
Supervisors making time and opportunity for analysts to use the skills	Good boss: gives growth opportunities, trusts employees, values their work, encourages two-way communication; available to employees
Not enough depth and breadth of assignments	Supervisor engagement

Level 4 – Agency Impact (departmental or agency impact on metrics)

- What would be the impact on the agency, if all the application we just discussed was happening at CALSTRS? What measures or metrics would be affected? Probe for Cost, Quality, Output, Time. Probe for metrics from CalSTRS scorecard or strategic plans. *(If needed – examples Cost – unit costs, overhead, temp costs / Quality – error reduction, rework reduction, compliance issues / output – forms, items processed / Time - cycle time improved, processing time reduced...)*
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CASE STUDY NOTE: Now we use this information to add to, delete from or modify the level four or Impact objectives.

Some of the information uncovered in this analysis indicated that for analysts and supervisors at this agency, they felt that the following would be important impacts to seek via the training program.

- Quality (e.g., executive team's decision easier; reduced rework)
- Cost (e.g., employee retention)
- Increases output / efficiency
- Consistency or improvement reflected in customer satisfaction score

Customized materials from the Agency to use in the program

Would you be willing to help us gather some examples of work products at CALSTRS?

- Good work examples for courses – reports, issue papers, case studies, stats, otherwise

The course list

- **Essential Analytical Skills**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Completed Staff Work**
- **Writing for Analysts**
- **Interpersonal Skills for Analysts**
- **Roles and Responsibilities of the Superior Analyst**
- **Principles of Government**

IMPORTANT – Don't forget to ask

Are there other important documents or CALSTRS materials that the ENTIRE TRAINING TEAM should be aware of? Documents, important cultural norms, shared values, etc at CALSTRS that we can use for our training team orientation?

- **Organizational chart**
- **Scorecard or other metrics related information**
- **Strategic plan for organization**
- **Analyst specific information**
- **Analyst desk guide(s)**
- **Other important measurement or metrics information**